

Aftermath

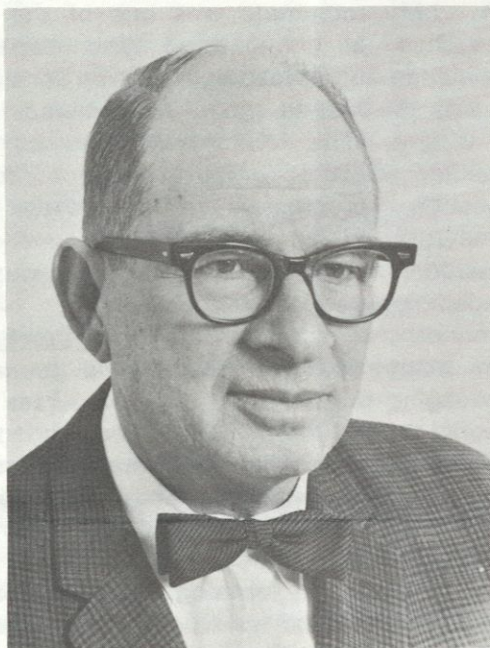
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The East Texas State University Mathematics Department Newsletter

Spring 1992

This is a special memorial edition of AFTERMATH. It honors three past teachers whose influence on mathematics education was immeasurable and whose dedication to students was truly admirable. We hope you enjoy it.

WILLIAM FLOYD HILL (1917-1991)



July 6, 1977 was the last day of service of a career in Texas education for William Floyd Hill, who began his teaching career in Granbury High School in 1938. When he retired as a Professor of Mathematics at East Texas State University, his career had spanned almost four decades. Dr. Hill received his first two degrees in Mathematics from North Texas State University. A course of study that might have routinely continued toward his Ph.D. was interrupted by World War II. After more than three years of service in the United States Navy, Lieutenant Hill returned to civilian life as a full-time Instructor of Mathematics at Texas A&M. He later left this post to resume his graduate studies at Baylor University, where he received his Ph.D. For the next thirteen years Floyd Hill was Professor of Mathematics and head of the Department at Howard Payne and Tarleton State Universities.

Desiring to return to full-time classroom teaching, he accepted in 1967 an offer to join the faculty of East Texas State University, where he served until retirement.

Dr. Hill was active in several professional organizations. His professional affiliations included: Texas Association of College Teachers, American Association of University Professors, Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematicians, Mathematics Association of America, and the American Mathematical Society. He regularly participated in these organizations by his attendance at professional meetings. He also continued his duties in the U.S. Naval Reserve, retiring with the Rank of Lieutenant Commander.

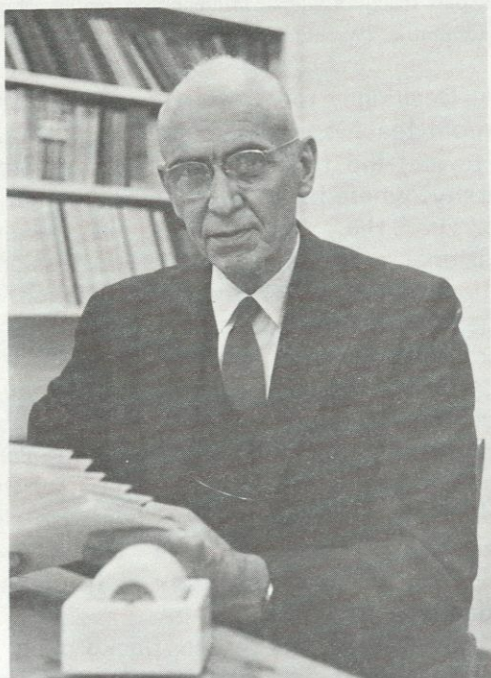
By virtue of a broad background in both pure and applied mathematics, he was able to reach many students inside the classroom. Helped by his training in educational administration, he took on many administrative tasks and completed them efficiently and conscientiously. These high academic standards were matched in all other areas of his life. As a dedicated husband and father, a devout church member, and a responsible citizen of the community, he displayed the qualities of a gentlemen in every sense of the word. No university ever had a better representative outside the classroom.

In addition to his serving the University in the classroom, he also served the University very effectively by virtue of the many committees he served on, both as a member and as chairman. He was a loyal and faithful supporter of the many programs of the Department and the University.

Students and colleagues alike were touched by the dedication and dignity of such a man as Floyd Hill.

After his retirement, Dr. Hill and his wife, Robbie, moved to Stephenville, Texas, where Mrs. Hill continues to live at 2160 Woodland.

**Dr. Cecil B. Wright
(1905-1980)
by DALE R. BEDGOOD
PROFESSOR OF MATHEMATICS**



From the time Cecil B. Wright first set foot on the campus of East Texas State Teachers College in 1934 as a part-time teacher in the Department of Mathematics until his retirement in 1967 as Professor of Mathematics and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, he touched, challenged, inspired, and generally impressed the hundreds of students who had contact with him. Many of his students were in awe of him as a mathematician and many more revered him for his excellence as a teacher and lecturer in mathematics.

After teaching as a part-time assistant professor from 1934 to 1940, mostly during the summer sessions, Cecil Wright became a full time faculty member in 1940. He was named the second head of the department of mathematics in 1947 upon the retirement of Dr. J. M. Bledsoe. Dr. Wright served as the first dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, beginning in 1963.

During my days as an undergraduate student of mathematics ('50-'54), my perspective and appreciation of Dr. Wright changed exponentially. In the early fifties, many of the

upper level and graduate students in mathematics were World War II veterans who were completing a degree. As one would expect, these students possessed more maturity, were more determined in their goals, and had the experience to more fully appreciate excellence in teaching than did students only a year or two out of high school. As a freshman I began to hear tales of his teaching and classroom antics, but it wasn't until my sophomore year that I had my first class with him. My roommate was one of the veterans who had a great thirst and capacity for knowledge and a deep appreciation for education. He was the first to espouse the praises to me of Dr. Wright. This former roommate says "... he expected students to learn. He kept informed of student's progress by frequently grading homework, giving lots of tests, and directing classroom questions toward individuals who needed motivating and challenging; I came to recognize this person as a Master Teacher." He, like many others, found his courses so challenging that he took all the courses that Dr. Wright taught. "Dr. Wright enjoyed teaching, utilized the total time and made presentations interesting; he always had a lesson plan regardless of the number of times or level of the course presented. I adopted many of his methods as my approach in teaching. He continues to live in his students and his students' students." "He was better than George Polya (the renowned mathematics educator from Stanford University)!"

Another former student says "... as a teacher he was very tough and demanding; he ran a tight ship." He had lots of quotes such as, "You can teach a puppy dog how to do differential calculus, but you cannot teach a puppy dog how to do integral calculus." On returning a test to the class, "... some of you need to take yourselves to the woodshed." Before returning a test in Calculus Applications, he said "I am chagrined that many of you drew a straight line for a parabola; I am also chagrined that some of you drew the curve in the wrong direction, and I am darned chagrined that some of you did not even attempt to draw the figures!" Another quote, "Problems are given to strengthen you and to develop ingenuity. Your purpose in this course is to grow and mature." Also, "Put down your work on paper such that no one will be able to dispute what you do!"

From a close friend and neighbor comes the story of the generosity and low-key assistance of Dr. Wright. In the early fifties the wife of the vicar of the small Episcopalian Church in Commerce was very distraught because her family's funds were insufficient to permit her to pursue a college degree. Dr. Wright, learning of her situation and of her thirst for knowledge, quietly provided funds for her tuition and books each semester until she graduated (with distinction). No one ever knew of this until years later.

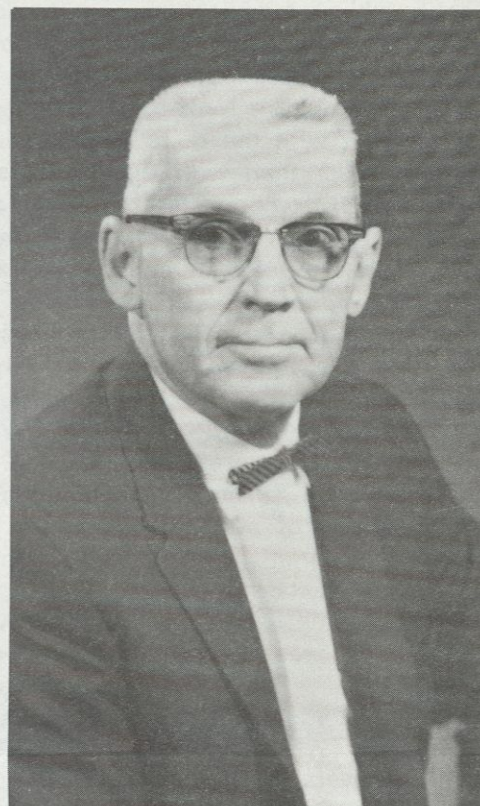
Anyone who was in one of Dr. Wright's classes will recall that he always wore a dark blue 3-piece suit and carried a pocket watch in a vest pocket. He always removed the watch and the coat and vest after arriving in the classroom, and it was intriguing to observe him each day unthreading the watch chain with a bob through a button hole from a vest pocket on opposite side from the watch.

He regularly collected homework in the calculus courses. I recall a friend who had a burning drive always to have perfection in his homework. I lived down the hall from him in the dorm. One afternoon he entered my room to inquire of my progress on a particular calculus problem. Neither of us having had success he coaxed me into going with him to Dr. Wright's office to obtain some assistance. I had never been there previously and he prevailed upon me to enter his office first. Dr. Wright, upon seeing the two of us, yelled at the top of his voice "OUT, OUT! I'm not doing any more of your homework problems!" Shocked, I didn't learn until sometime later that my friend had been a frequent visitor to Dr. Wright's office and had been warned the day before that no more of his homework would be done for him. My friend took me along and sent me in first as a buffer.

Another former student wrote of Dr. Wright with great warmth and feeling. He mentioned that "... as a teaching fellow under his supervision with every criticism came a suggestion and compliment." "Dr. Wright cast a shadow at noon just as long as any time of the day, and even in death his shadow remains." He recalls that Dr. Wright was a great domino player and really loved the game.

NOTE: I wish to thank the several former students of Dr. Wright who provided interesting, helpful insights into his teaching. Many of Dr. Wright's former students considered him their friend. From my personal experience, I know that included in his vast array of friends were many of his former students.

Mr. Weldon W. (Bub) Taylor
(1908-1991)



(The following excerpts, prepared by Dr. J. M. Lafferty (with editing changes), are from Mr. Taylor's retirement proclamation in May, 1973.)

It has been said that let a man step down from a major administrative post in the grove of academia and it sets off a round of musical chairs. Several men move up, several wives are made happier. But let a master teacher step down and there are no winners. Lose a master teacher, a 30 year master teacher, from academic halls and you strike a blow at the stomach of a university, any university! And the gut ache will not go away in a single semester, or in a brilliant research project, or in a published book, or in a grant from the NSF.

A common commodity is the college professor who regards his skill in the classroom as a composite of Socrates, "Mr. Chips," and a twist of Oral Roberts. Like Ronald Reagan, the professor is comforted by the knowledge that in his heart he is right! But with the professor there is always that nagging suspicion that what passes for fire in the cardiac region is really only a heartburn. That he may be more an artisan than artist!

To honor Bub Taylor's career, however, is no exercise in wishful thinking and self-nomination. As a card carrying member of a community of scholars he could have wrapped the royal purple of his discipline around him and insisted that students come as trembling supplicants. He could have drawn his class presentation from lecture notes old enough to be canonized! He could have. But he didn't. Instead he, like Mohammed, went to the mountain. Went with the quite commitment of a parish priest rather than with the brashness of a Harold Hill and 76 trombones! Armed with a range of interests that make the Avon Lady's range of products look like an austerity program he practiced what John Dewey preached. With archery and antique clocks, with chess and camping, with checkers and cameras, with home built telescopes and home built fishing lures he gave sense to symbols, made π^2 and the Pythagorean Theorem more friend than foe. In so doing he stripped so many layers from the terrifying mystique of mathematics as to prompt one observer to comment, "His teaching strategy should carry an 'X' classification."

Where is the hard proof that the magic of this man's career was not just another exercise in wishful thinking? You, his former students, supplied most of it! And his colleagues supplied some of it. Two years before Mr. Taylor's retirement his peers, the faculty, at ETSU made it

official: Faculty Distinguished Teaching Award! (Only the third given at ETSU.) As men and women of reason---did the devil make them do it? Unlike most of us, then, when autumn leaves began to fall, Bub Taylor needed no reassurance. Needed no hurriedly pulled together last minute statement of support. When a University professor can carry with him 51 per cent of the votes of his peers it is not wishful thinking! A miracle, maybe, but definitely not wishful thinking.

It was easy to get sentimental about this man. But we should not have wept. For each day was a time for respect, affection and gratitude. And, of course a reading of the will!

Bub Taylor began his teaching career in the public schools at \$90/month seven years before World War II, and then taught for the War Department during the war years. He had several non-mathematical interests in which he became well known. He was probably best known for his expertise in checkers, often being challenged by several players at one time. He also became proficient in the skills of archery and served as an archery instructor for several summers in camps for young people. Photography and antique clock collecting and restoration were major hobbies. But his main outside recreation through the years was bass fishing.

Mrs. Virginia Taylor continues to live in their home at 1707 Jackson Street in Commerce.

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